WORKFORCE HORIZONS

Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

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WORKFORCE PLANNING MAXIM OF THE DAY

"Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future."- **John F. Kennedy**

HOW SUCCESSION PLANNING DIFFERS FROM REPLACEMENT PLANNING

What is succession planning? It is a process for preparing people to meet an organization's talent needs over time.[1]It is sometimes referred to as succession management to emphasize that it is a continuous process ongoing and never ending. There has always been a need for succession planning but it is more urgent now than ever before because of the aging workforce and pending retirements of key people in most organizations nationwide.

Many organizations do some sort of replacement planning. They may identify one or more individuals in the organization as potential successors to each key position and consider this "pool" to draw from when the position becomes vacant. They may even identify competencies required for each position and make some effort to create

development opportunities to better prepare the employees in the "pool" for possible advancement.

But succession planning is different from replacement planning. It is more than simply finding replacements for key individuals. Replacement planning usually restricts consideration of employees in the "pool" for a particular position to a narrow "silo" of candidates working in a particular section or department rather than the whole organization. But more importantly, it makes the assumption that the organization chart will remain unchanged over time. It is focused on the needs of the present time.

Succession planning, on the other hand is more future focused. It considers that the world is fluid and changing. The positions needed in the future, may not be the same ones needed today. Succession planning includes replacement planning but is not focused so much on preparing persons to succeed to a particular position on today's

org chart but rather to develop deep and broad bench strength in the organization in competencies required for different levels of work rather than for specific positions. This is done by creating "talent pools" for different levels of work rather than for specific positions. A "talent pool" is simply a group of employees being prepared for more challenging responsibilities. For example a "talent pool" might be created by identifying competencies needed for Division Chiefs and a "talent pool" developed for such jobs. Another set of competencies and "talent pool" might be developed for first-line supervisors.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING

Below are some guidelines for developing your succession planning strategy:[2]

Focus on Important and Hard-to Fill Jobs: Succession planning is not just for the executive level jobs but nor is it for every position in the organization. Your strategy should be to focus on the most important jobs or positions. First determine the *value of the job* to the organization's success. What does this job contribute to the organization's mission? What would be the impact of having a bad performer? What is the cost of mistakes? Is this an "only one," a position in which key duties are performed by one person who is the only expert with no backup?

Of course part of this evaluation process is to determine whether the job or position is needed at all or whether it is needed in its present form. Will the skill sets needed in the future be different from what is currently needed? Will it be more efficient to create new positions or jobs with a different mix of tasks and competencies to achieve this function in the future?

After determining the value of the job, determine *how easy it is to replace or fill the job*. Is there a shortage of qualified talent as potential successors? Will it take a long time to train a successor? Those jobs that are important and difficult to replace should top the list of your succession planning strategy.

Define Competencies: When developing competencies, start with your organizational strategy. As an organization what must you accomplish to be successful? For true succession planning rather than replacement planning you should develop competency models for different levels of jobs in the organization (for example, one competency model for executives, another for managers, another for first-line supervisors, another for technical professionals). A competency model is a narrative description of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and other abilities that lead to outstanding performance. Note that the focus should be on competencies that define outstanding performance not just acceptable performance. Focus on the success factors, the competencies that really make a difference in distinguishing top performers from mediocre performers. Leave out the "nice-to-haves" and minimum qualifiers. Use competencies that differentiate between levels. Your executives should have different competencies from your first-line supervisors. Define your competencies so they can adapt with changes in your organization. Finally, you should limit yourself to 8-10 competencies per level to have a manageable number.

Assess your current talent: How do you identify who goes into the "talent pool" for a particular job or level? First, distinguish between current performance and future roles. Obviously, persons should not be considered for advancement if they are not performing successfully in their current jobs

even though successful performance in the current job is no guarantee of success at a higher or different level. Therefore, objective and accurate performance appraisal on the current job is needed. Beyond assessing actual performance on the current job, the potential of the employee for performing at other levels must be assessed in order for him or her to be included in a talent pool for that level and in order to identify the gaps between requirements and what the employee has in order to create a development plan for the employee. Some organizations rely heavily on "bosses" to nominate subordinates for inclusion in a talent pool for succession planning. Although their input can be included, this should not be the sole determiner. The best method is to identify the competencies needed for the talent pool and then assess each person on the competencies using multiple data sources and multi-raters such as competency-based panel interviews, relevant observed behaviors, and validated assessments of job related knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and traits.

Check Out the Civil Service Supervisory Potential Assessment Tool designed for state employees who are not currently in a supervisory level position but wish to develop their potential as a first-line supervisor. Go to http://www.civilservice.la.gov/asp/SupvAssessmentTool/SupvSkillsTool.aspx

Develop the Talent Pool: Engage managers in developing their people and make them accountable for it. Provide growth opportunities such as job rotation, mentoring, education or skill-building opportunities. Identify or create opportunities for persons to practice skills they will need in future roles.

Specific methods of developing the talent pool may include in-house leadership development programs, competency menus in print or online that provide specific developmental suggestions to individuals: books to read, classroom courses to attend, online courses or webinars, on-the-job assignments to seek out, or action learning projects that bring together groups of people to solve business problems permitting means to build competencies in new areas.

[1]Material in this article is adapted from "Ten Key Steps to Effective Succession Planning" by William J. Rothwell, Ph.D. (2008) www.halogensoftware.com

[2]Material in this article is adapted from these sources:

"Succession Planning: Four Imperatives for Success" by Assess Systems – A Bigby Havis Company, *Best Practices in Succession Planning* special supplement, Workforce Management, (October 2008)

"Ten Key Steps to Effective Succession Planning" by William J. Rothwell, Ph.D. (2008) www.halogensoftware.com

QUOTE OF THE DAY
"Never mind your happiness; do your duty."
– **Peter F. Drucker**